(d) if so, in what manner?

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Government seek to establish a relationship of trust, friendship and cooperation with Pakistan. Government are aware of the view that increased people-to-people interaction would promote goodwill between the two countries. Government are, therefore, following a policy of encouraging people-to-people contacts and promoting greater interaction among scholars, intellectuals, journalists, writers, artistes, businessmen and others. Government have unilaterally eased the issuance of visas to Pakistani nationals. As a consequence, there has been a substantial increase in the number of visas issued to Pakistani nationals.

(c) and (d) While Pakistan in bilateral discussions has given firm indications that it is easing its visa regime for Indian nationals, Government are not aware of any steps taken by Pakistan in this regard.

Missile Race between India and Pakistan

948. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a news-item published in the Hindustan Times dated the 8th July, 1997 captioned "India-Pak must halt missile race, analysts";

(b) whether it is a fact that with the missile race hotting up with the recent test firing of the Half III missile by Pakistan, the possibility of its use in the conventional mode cannot be ruled out; and

(c) if so, whether Government propose to include this issue in the agenda of confidence-building measures for the next round of Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan?

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. India has taken note of the Pakistani missile programme and its impact on the region's security. Government closely monitor all developments relating to it and have taken all necessary steps to safeguard the country's security in accordance with our threat perceptions.

(c) The dialogue with Pakistan has been resumed at the Foreign Secretary level and, following the last round of discussions in Islamabad, a Joint Statement was issued which envisages discussions on "peace and security" issues. The substance and the modalities of these discussions will be elaborated at the next round of Foreign Secretary level talks.

Pakistan's complaint about Deployment of Prithvi

949. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the report published in "Washington Post" (USA) in the first week of June, 1997 regarding Pakistan's complaint about India's deployment of Ballistic Missile "Prithvi" near Indo-Pak Border, as well as to the news item captioned "Pakistan warns of steps against Prithvi Missile", appearing in the Times of India of the 6th June, 1997;

(b) if so, what is the reaction of Government and of the US Secretary of state to these reports; and

(c) whether Government of India have clarified the real position to both the Government of Pakistan and to US Secretary of state?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Government have issued a Press Statement in this regard on 14 June, 1997 categorically stating that Prithvi missiles have not been deployed.

Response to India's Suggestion to Upgrade Military Might

950. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question